

# BE A PART OF STOREFRONT

## Support your best alternative

13 Evolution of the portable studio, on the facade of Storefront by James Calvert, Frank Fantauzzi and Terrence Van Elslander, 1992



The place is shaped like a slice of pizza, and its not much bigger, but there's nothing small about the visions on view at STOREFRONT for Art and Architecture. Architectural exhibitions at STOREFRONT, which operates on a shoestring (and often a frayed one at that), have been putting museums to shame for years.

NEW YORKER'S  
March 13, 1989

STOREFRONT has become a center for innovation, for art that is inherently involved with urban issues and public life. There is no other place in New York, or in most cities, that regularly operates as an active forum to examine the future of public, urban life through the activities of artists and architects throughout the world.

Art Forum  
March, 1987

In a tiny storefront, big design ideas grow. Despite its size, STOREFRONT has managed to put together a number of pretty impressive shows and lecture programs, and to make their presence felt all over the world.

NEW YORK TIMES  
October 27, 1988

Here is an "anti-museum," willfully uncommercial architecture... Underdog Monuments like the STOREFRONT gives us a window onto this world. They let us see the people's aspirations made manifest in the structure they regularly and passionately create.

METROPOLITAN HOMES  
September 1989

Small and scruffy and held together, it seems, only by the strong will of a dedicated few, the STOREFRONT for Art and Architecture, in SoHo, occupies a critical place in New York's artistic ecology.

NEW YORK TIMES  
February, 1988

STOREFRONT is the last frontier of Avant Garde within an increasing retro-capitalist world.

Nam June Paik

STOREFRONT... mighty mouse of gallery... more provocative ideas per square inch than any museums in New York.

Kent Barwick

From its founding, STOREFRONT has been the most innovative, progressive, and fearless gallery devoted to architecture in the United States. Tireless in its friendship for experiment, STOREFRONT has been a unique resource for both practitioners and public, a stimulus, a goad, a forum, and a friend. In an age of easy architectural virtue, STOREFRONT has never flinched in fighting the good fight on behalf both of architecture as a social practice and of architecture as the untrammeled realm of fantasy and art.

Michael Sorkin

### Individual Contribution

I would like to make a contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to STOREFRONT. My contribution is tax deductible to the full extent of the law, and the check is made payable to:

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14  
An Earthscratcher for Century City  
by Dagmar Richter



THE ART OF COPY: REREADING THE CITY  
Dagmar Richter

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# DAGMAR RICHTER

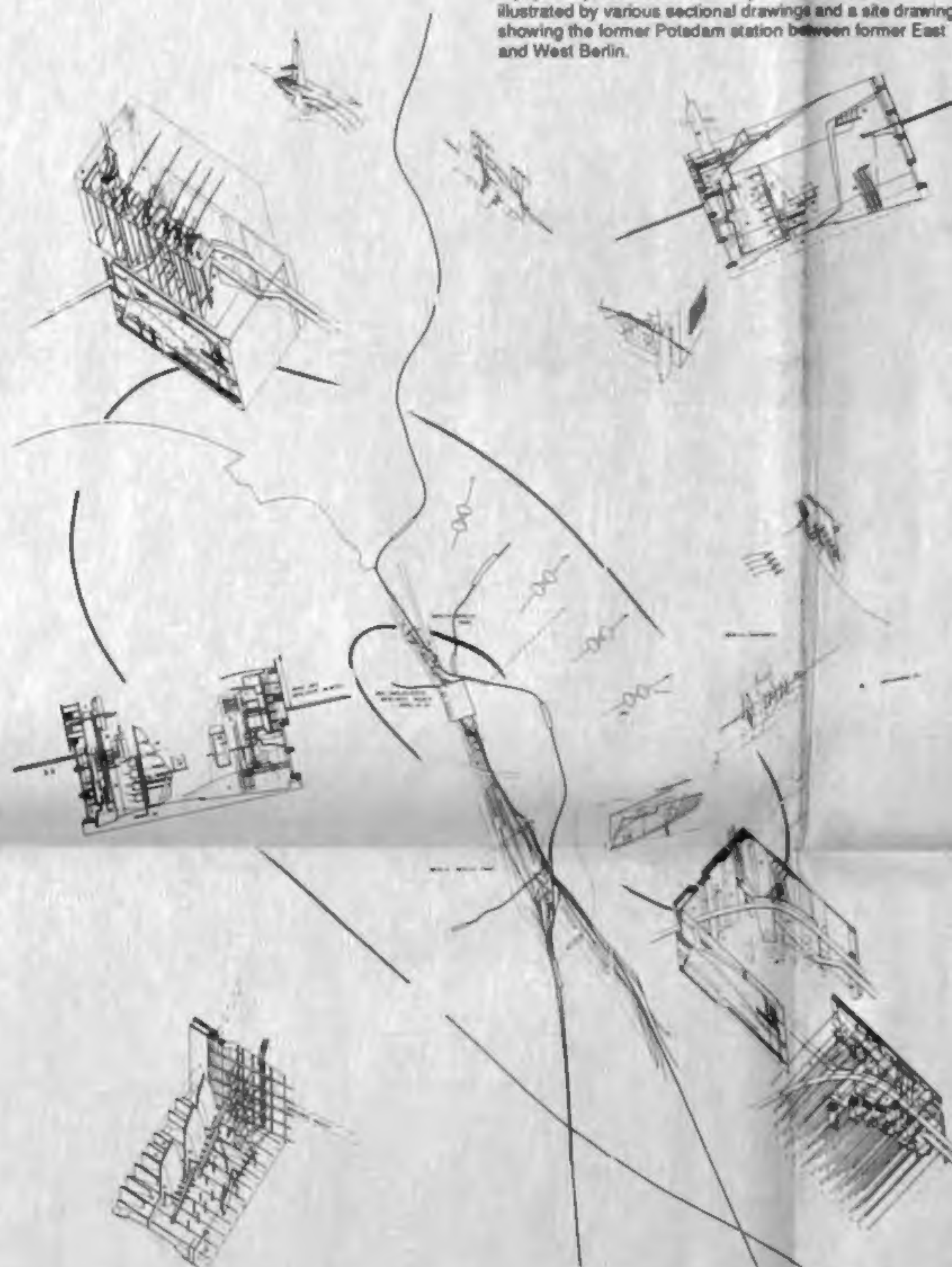
## The Art of Copy: Rereading the City

Berlin

Los Angeles

Beirut

1  
Berlin III  
A paper city, accessible mentally from all sides, is illustrated by various sectional drawings and a site drawing showing the former Potsdam station between former East and West Berlin.



2  
Berlin III  
Perspective site plan showing the electronic network already overcoming the east and west partitioning.

DEC. 5-JAN. 15  
1992-93

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY-SATURDAY 12-6 PM  
OPENING RECEPTION: DECEMBER 5, SATURDAY, 6-8 PM

STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY, 10012, U.S.A. TEL: 212.431.5795 FAX: 212.431.5755

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The National Endowment for the Arts.

### THE ART OF COPY

How then must a society be conditioned so that experience with history can integrate itself into the work of real experienced architecture without it being again and anew the bearer of past images. (1)

#### The Marked-The Unmarked (2)

At the beginning of the century architecture and the arts tried to wipe the slate clean. Modernists claimed to destroy the bourgeois patriarchal nature of ornament and spatial organization by creating spaces without any historical traces. It was to be made difficult, as Walter Benjamin wrote, to "leave traces" because traces will go against men as they force upon him a pattern of habit. (3) The surface of the wall should not be a surface for images, but rather should just be organized (in an aesthetic, hygienic sense). The grid as an organizational form should produce a silence that allows all to breathe.

It seems obvious that a feminist approach to architecture might once again try to gain authority through a similar architectural praxis of negation.

Negation as a basis of architectural design actually brought us two readings, that of

silence, which allowed the user to free himself from the terror of consumerism and historical bonds; and that of totalization, which was read as brutal suppression. Within a well established oppositional thinking framework, one had to choose between a pure negation or a positivist historicist approach. Both arguments limit the possibility of a more sophisticated reading by all users.

It is the space in-between which ought to be investigated. The following research tries to find an architecture in which one does not have to move into the realm of the unmarked or into restoring a cultural representation which is politically questionable, but in which one establishes difference by moving towards the realm of experience by, as Benjamin wrote, "the collective in an absent minded state".

#### The Author

Architecture finds itself in a decade of massive PR for a few singular authors-a situation in which the popular press is more fascinated by Philip Johnson's political past and current power plays, Peter Eisenman's latest faux pas or Michael Graves' shoes than it is by their work.

What is sold on the commercial architectural market is not so much the product, but the "aura" of a unique author, an aura that is given currency by the public's insistence on establishing the author, not the work, as the authority. The work, then, is imprisoned in a framework of easily recognizable repetition which, established as style, signifies the author even if he pronounces the author for dead, and cannot be changed without the author losing authority. This crisis of authority goes so far today that several authors use specific decorative props (the spectacles, the particular bow tie, suspenders, etc.) and do not dare to change these trademarks for fear of undercutting their easy recognizability.

Of course there is always authorship, always an author, but its definition seems to be nothing other, as El Lissitzky described it, "than a frozen motion picture of a process". For those new members in this cultural production, who only slowly enter the discourse, this myth of authorship is a critical one. To concentrate on the process of making sheds some critical light on this issue. Creativity, brilliance, eternal value and the secret (4) were questionable concepts Benjamin already addressed a long time ago and they still seem questionable within the architectural production today.

It is not history which is the burden, but the fact that the historical tradition in the institutionalized cultural world has been made into an instrument of power (5).

#### The Art of Copy

The following projects were used to establish a methodology based on the art of copy. Most of the spaces we experience are random and circumstantial; some of it consciously formulated, most of it the product of chance. We are confronted with numerous levels and layers of visual text and physical experience, much of which is not the product of any conscious architectural act. As a result, our sites of operation have been surfaces which let us read numerous different layers of physical information simultaneously, most of which is not institutionalized and is experienced by everyone. Rosalind Krauss has written:

The pattern books that are the backbone of architectural production, so that a building can be cooked up from a detail taken from here and a ground plan drawn from there, are just one example of the extent to which production has always been at one level the art of making copies from other art. (6)

#### BERLIN III

Project Credits: Dagmar Richter and Ulrich Hinrichsmeyer

In 1988 Kristin Feireiss along with the Senate of Berlin organized an exhibition to which architects around the world were invited. The exhibition was called Berlin: Monument or model for thought. At that time the still existing wall was one of the major obstacles addressed by most of the architects.

We decided to produce a pure model of thought-a Berlin III-totally walled in and mentally accessible from both sides. The formal expression of this Berlin III was the result of a

process of translations from a number of images and spatial information into an imaginary imploding block structure at the site of the former Potsdam station, situated between East and West Berlin. The material we used for the copying process ranged far and wide: from Richter paintings to examples of explosive space, like airships under construction and photographs of black holes, from the Merz Bau by Kurt Schwitters to a computer chip from a communications network, finally including the traces and memories of physical structures left on the site.

A process of copy-making suggested transformations through a translation from one visual text obtained through a two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional architectonic description.

The resulting physical construct was the outcome of a translation of found spatial information into a structure which refused to use surface as pure and singular text.

The site of operation, the two-dimensional surface, was seen as a site in permanent transformation through a process oriented drawing ritual. The work was then read as a thin new layer created through the rereading of indefinite simultaneous other layers of information.

The problem of the Berlin project was partly that the reading material consisted largely of established institutionalized art. The material available even if one tries to avoid the institutionalized information is certainly still indefinite. As Rosalind Krauss has put it:

The copyist is not only the slave of imitation. He is also at times the master of invention. Needing to decide about ambiguous patches, he conjures a reading by imagining what would make sense... Furthermore, one's feeling that ritual or other kinds of repeated forms have their source of meaning in some long since forgotten referent from which the forms derived but which they no longer in any way resemble, only adds to the suggestive resonance of these forms. Their quality as coded vehicles of repetition is what gives them their aesthetic authority... The copy is simultaneously a term of demystification and process or rather of demystification because of process. (7)

In architectural design the spatial and surface representations used within the process are found in any space independent of size. They have therefore to be translated into an architectural space, which includes scale, use, logic of construction and projection of materials to be used.

The act of reading in architectural terms manifests itself through a process of re-representation of representation: the act of copying from found material, which will ideally shed some light on new possibilities for understanding in critical terms the hidden orders of space.





area's image. The dominant singular objects, the skyscraper's forbidding skins, celebrating their verticality and spatial control, were filmed, enlarged and recopied. This process revealed spaces of folding and layering in the otherwise sleek surfaces of the buildings that would have gone unnoticed.

During the further process emphasis was put on two distinct architectural properties:

- 1 Spatial boundaries
- 2 Infrastructural and structural elements.

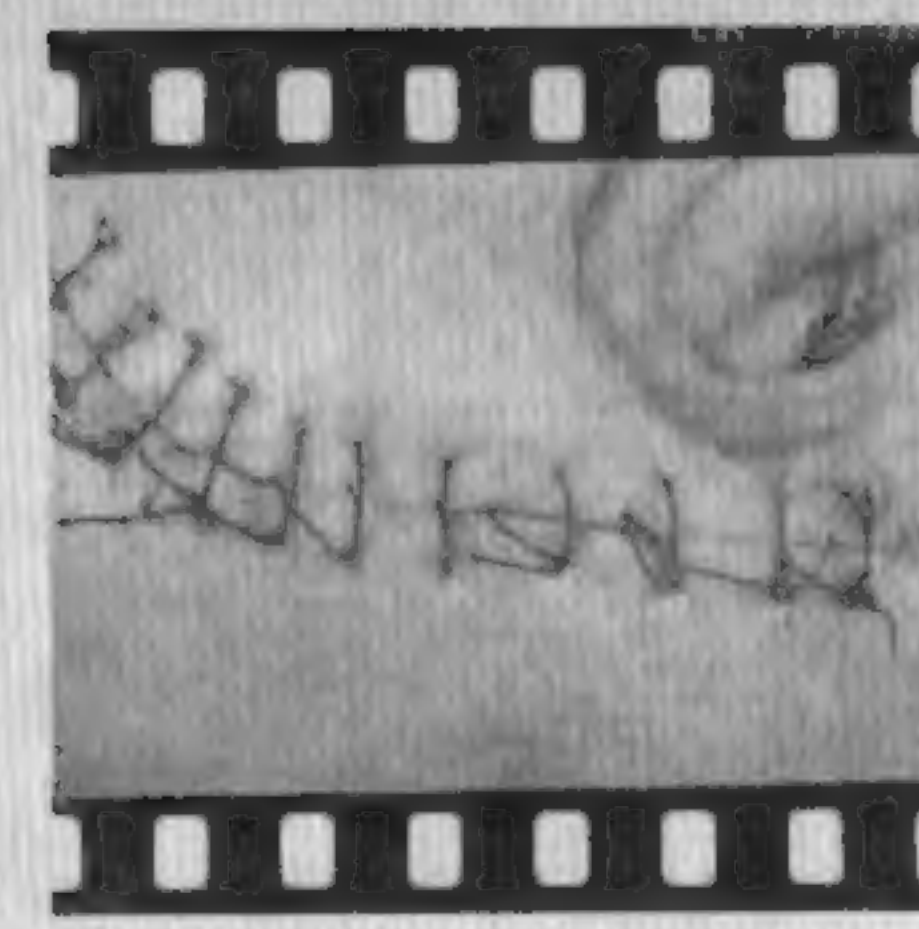
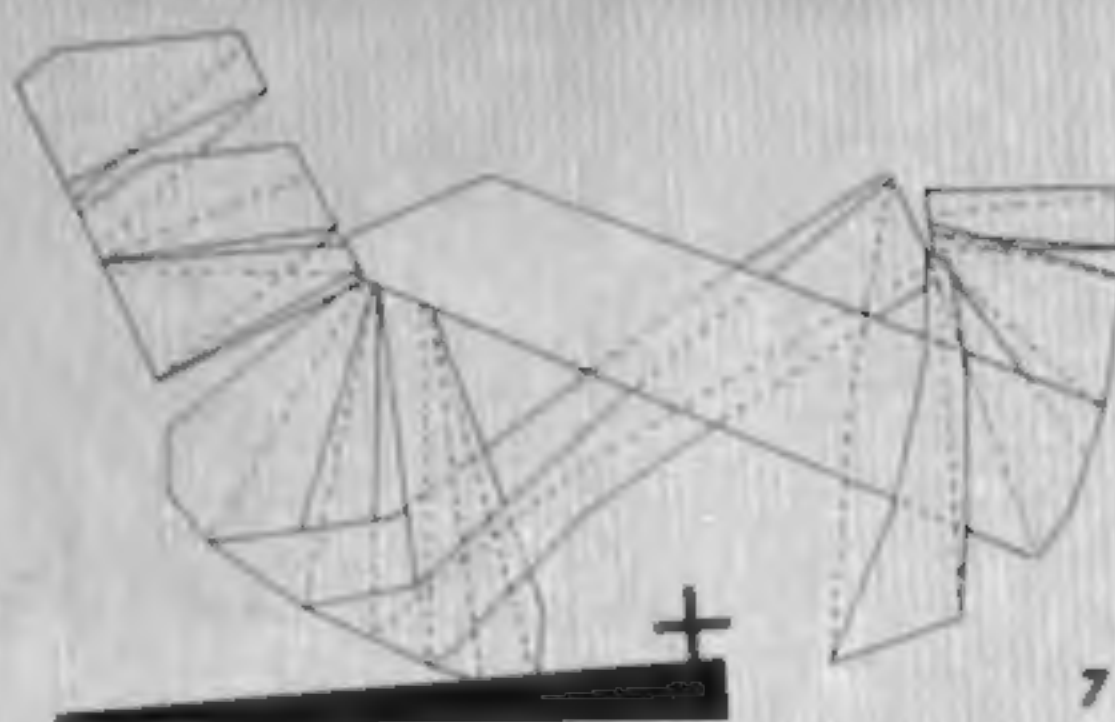
#### Veneers, Surfaces and Boundaries

A filmic method, not necessarily used in its direct sense, as with cutting and splicing, but in its inherent structural logic, makes it possible to develop a space solely for the purpose of visual pleasure and as the

carrier for human activity. The choice of working with veneer and surface can be traced back to the site's former history as a ground for film-making where conceptually, the surface used had the sole purpose of 'not letting the character fall off' (8).

#### Infrastructures and Structures

Construction, as an independent element in my reading, is used merely within the second set of copies, where the attempt is made to copy an order of structure and infrastructure onto the site. These structures develop in this project an existence of their own. In film sets, as in newer architectural sections, the importance of the space in-between, the space of fasteners, insulation, air buffer zones and second structures, becomes apparent. Different generic sections through skyscrapers were used to detail their rhythm-



veneer territories, originating at the Place des Canons, are made by folding and unfolding the earth's surface. Through this insertion of new material a careful repair and transformation of the existing area will be possible without destroying its essence.

I find myself in an indefinite process of finding, transcription and reinscribing architectural space. This process folds upon itself, creating layers of small changes after every new architectural transformation. In no sense is the author dead. But there are many authors. There is a steady flux of people in my office who all in a profound way influence the next reading taken, as they are constantly asked to re-evaluate the found condition we are working with. Everyone of those who actively participate leaves numerous traces within the process.

I do not believe that after historicism fails architec-

ture is left with nothing. The contrary is true, it is left with layers and folding of spatial information that make the process of selection and elimination a crucial one.

— Dagmar Richter

#### Notes

1. Michael Muller, *Architektur und Avantgarde*, Athenäum, Frankfurt/Main, 1987, p.125.
2. A part of the Los Angeles project description has appeared in *Assemblage* 14.
3. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, Frankfurt am Main, 1968.
4. *ibid.*, p.149.
5. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Tiedemann Schwanenberger, 1, 2, p.665.
6. Rosalind Krauss, *The originality of the Avant Garde*

#### Dagmar Richter

Rereading Los Angeles: A Primitive Rebel's Account

from *Assemblage* 14, 1991

Three projects (West Coast Gateway Competition, International Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition and Rereading of Los Angeles: An Earthscratcher for Century City) are presented here as nodes in Dagmar Richter's ongoing research program dedicated to the architectural remapping of the primary structural features of the city of Los Angeles. The freeway, one of the fundamental determinants of its geographical and social divisions, provides the strategies both of tilting up vertically (West Coast Gateway) and of superimposing horizontally

## Berlin

## Los Angeles

## Beirut

## Berlin

## Los Angeles

## Beirut

My attempt lies in the conscious perspective of the savage reader, that is, the uninformed as well as critical observer, distanced from the architectural institution through her gender, the reader as Virginia Woolf describes her 'with a difference of view and a difference of standard'.

The outcome, ideally a persuasive novelty of a re-description through the eyes of the savage, disregards the reader's role as consumer but puts forward the reader as producer of meaning. Even if one can regard this work as being formalistic, since there has not been even a partial attempt to rationalize these copying exercises as anything else, I am still convinced that form and space in their pure aesthetic sense influence human activities beyond the statistical and into the metaphysical. The political aspect of the reading activity lies merely in the conscious attempt to select a frame and viewpoint, the refusal to accept the familiar as a rational and structured objective representation of reality, but merely as a text full of Socratic faith where the agreed-upon rules made by the few are declared as facts and rationally achieved results.

The major act in this process remains the choice of the material. As I see us confronted with numerous layers of information, the act of finding, which is of course at the same time an act of choosing, is a conceptually crucial one. One is always confronted with various choices: between historical high art, populist imagery, site related information or issues of experience. The process of copying allows you the possibility of inserting a graft, of adding another layer of concern to the process.

In the Los Angeles project I began to study how the found material can be entirely site related and translated into an urban public space. Rosalind Krauss describes this as a procedural space of transcription — of the translation of one medium into another.

#### Rereading the City: An Earthscratcher for Century City

**Project credits:** Dagmar Richter with Joshua Levine, Theodore Zomboulakis, Anna Bolneset, Cordell Steinmetz, Robert Thibodeau. Before 1958, Century City was the site where Century Fox film studios had a whole array of simulated environments, including entire cities and lakes made to order. 30 years later after a 'successful' planning effort, we are today confronted with a 'prestige address for business, shopping, luxury living, theater going, dining and guest accommodation'. Century City is described by the local Chamber of Commerce as a landmark for modern urban development.

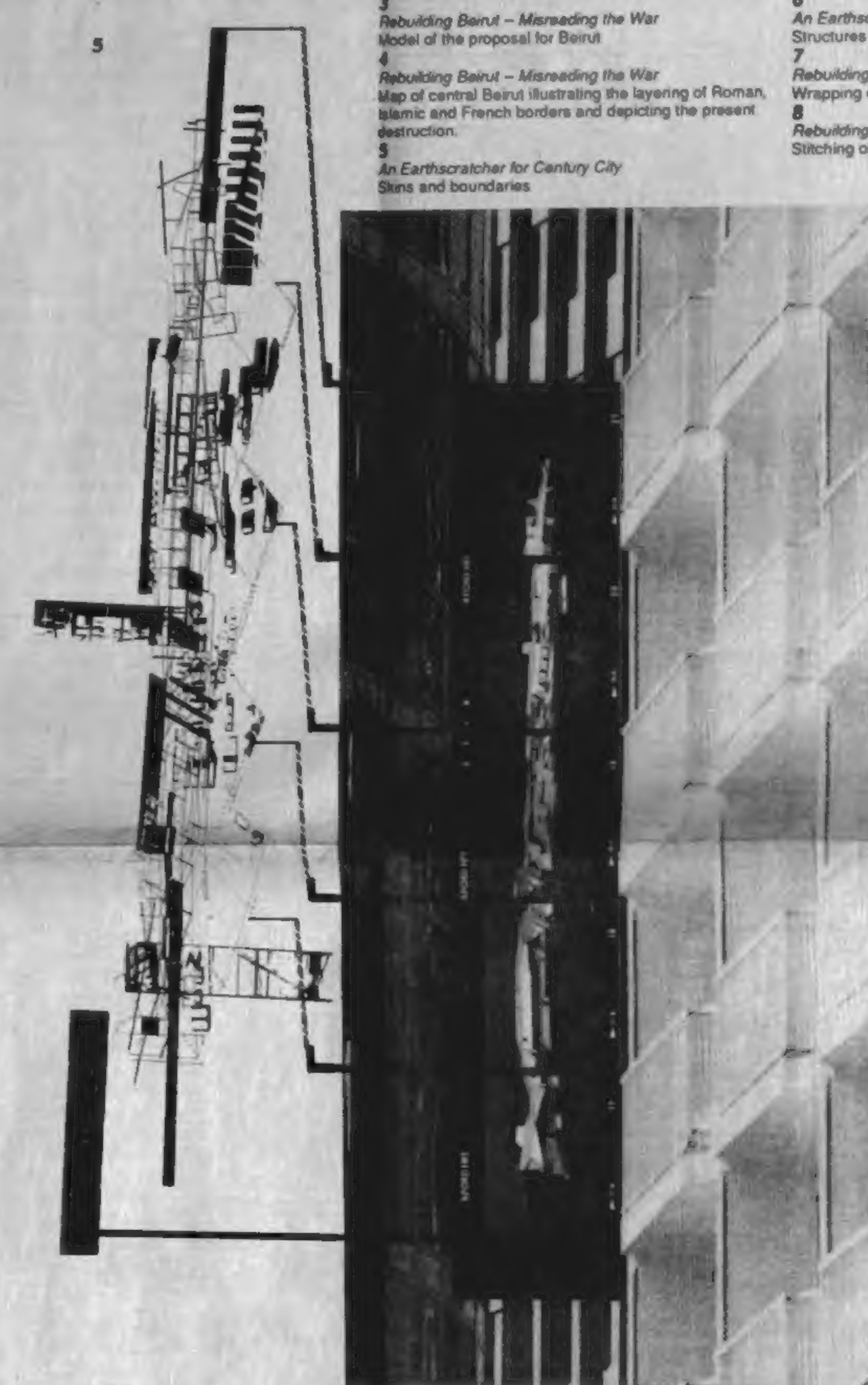
30 years ago when Twentieth Century Fox Studios faced near bankruptcy after their box office disaster 'Cleopatra', Welton Becket was hired by the developers and SP Skouras the chairman of the board of the Studios, to create a concept that would transform the back lot of the dream factory into a futuristic city and thereby, through real estate transactions, rescue the film industry. The planners envisioned a total community, anchored by a strong business base. Today, Century City stands as the ideal outcome of modernist planning and formal ideology. The emphasis lies on cleanliness, open spaces, verticality, a car oriented infrastructure and its independence from the rest of the city.

Century City proved to be an interesting test to read. Most striking was the contrast between the sleek, mirrored, antiseptic anonymity of the current development and the haphazard, rather lawdy and vulgar nature of the self-conscious artificiality of its previous existence as a film set. A working process was employed that made use of three forms of site readings, one historical and two contemporary. First, maps from various times in Century City's past were copied and overlapped. These contained the traces and markings of forgotten landscapes: dislocated film towers, movable lakes and film production sheds, oil fields, orange groves and one-family bungalow structures which now once again rose to the surface. From these residues, a new topography of traces was elaborated that incorporated the previously hidden that had been bulldozed over by the developers.

Second, Century City's current state was also used.

At two recording methods were employed: A: The shadows of the site, the uncanny, a transformed trace of the object of study was recorded. In a ritual of recopying the obtained information, different speeds and directions transformed the trace, to reflect the experience of the place as it is perceived while driving through. The shadows can be seen as a manifestation of a hidden order, an asymmetrical collapse of the vertical object onto a projection screen-the space in-between.

B: As a final study of Century City's current site condition, a photographic, or rather filmic, technique was used to allow analysis of the



#### 3 Rebuilding Beirut -- Misreading the War

Model of the proposal for Beirut

#### 4 Rebuilding Beirut -- Misreading the War

Map of central Beirut illustrating the layering of Roman, Islamic and French borders and depicting the present destruction.

#### 5 An Earthscratcher for Century City

Skins and boundaries

#### 6 An Earthscratcher for Century City

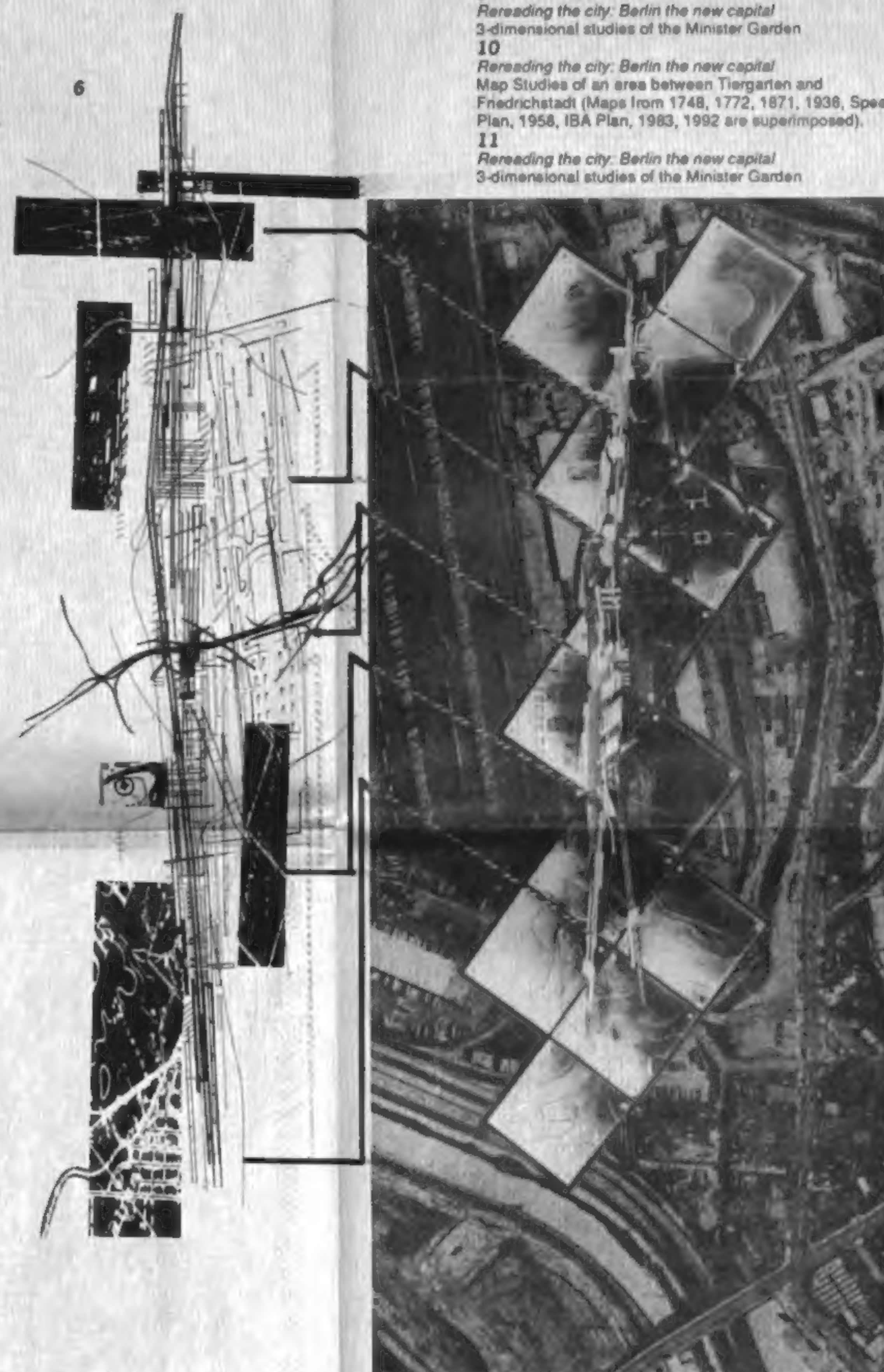
Structures and infrastructures

#### 7 Rebuilding Beirut -- Misreading the War

Wrapping of body

#### 8 Rebuilding Beirut -- Misreading the War

Stitching of body



#### 9 Rereading the city: Berlin the new capital

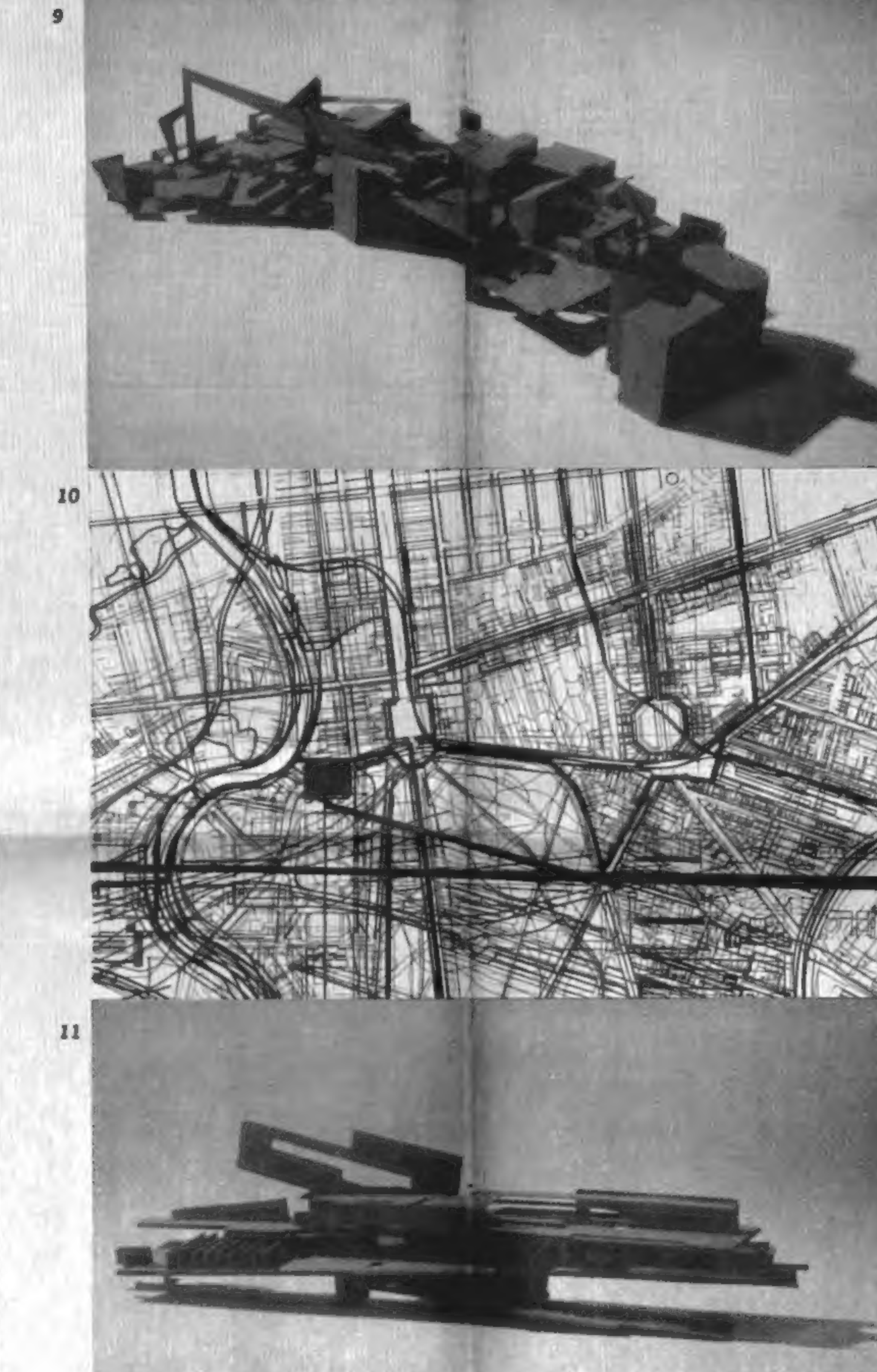
3-dimensional studies of the Minister Garden

#### 10 Rereading the city: Berlin the new capital

Map Studies of an area between Tiergarten and Friedrichstadt (Maps from 1748, 1772, 1871, 1938, Spear Plan, 1958, IBA Plan, 1983, 1992 are superimposed).

#### 11 Rereading the city: Berlin the new capital

3-dimensional studies of the Minister Garden



cality and relationship to the buildings' boundaries. A transformation from vertical to horizontal allowed the repetitive elements to hold in place a linear infrastructure which was derived from a study of the elevator's role in Century City's skyscrapers, depicted within the shadow studies of the site. As a graft we used the form, but not the program, of the Los Angeles freeways and train tracks to find dynamic horizontal layers which can be translated into bicycle paths, running tracks, magnetic railways and crosswalks. The working drawings which consisted of layers of copies from found spatial information, were used as a text further to develop working models for the study areas of skin and infrastructure.

#### Juxtaposition

In the next stage, the collapse of both working models into yet another structure allowed the first studies of incongruities between skin and structure, establishing an array of spaces in-between. These incongruities were used to insert a critical rereading of the obtained space. The new model inserts itself onto Century City's structure as an architectural parasite in the form of an earthscratcher that connects two different green spaces through an array of surfaces, antiprogrammes and artificial landscapes. Numerous skins cover, connect, carry and shade human activities. This model stands as yet another text available to the reader to interpret. It can be seen as a text about further spatial development for Century City.

#### Misreading

During the exercises done within the last years, one emerging aspect to be addressed within the act of reading and copying was the deliberate act of mis-

reading. Misreading is used as a critical tool to help transform found spatial information when inconsistencies occur. During the process of copying the reader does not therefore necessarily try to match the incongruities to the found condition, but uses the gap to insert grafts into the process.

#### REBUILDING BEIRUT -- MISREADING THE WAR

**Project credits:** Dagmar Richter with Theodore Zomboulakis, Anna Bolneset, Eileen Yankowski.

#### Strategies of Destruction and Repair

This project uses the plan material available to develop an architectural strategy of repair. The studio chose to read the different maps of Beirut, from antiquity to the fairly recent ruins of French planning, in order to record a series of layers produced by catastrophes and repair. Catastrophes brought about by human violence or natural disaster historically have become a buried underlayer for the production of a new architecture. The new structures chose to ignore the fact of a tragic repetition and tried to produce a new image of undisturbed unity and timelessness.

The destroyed area of the markets between the place d'Etoile and the Place des Canons has been chosen as a site for an abstract operation. Today as Beirut is contemplating its renewal, the development of the souk area between the two places which has been largely destroyed, is hindered by decentralized ownership. A different approach to new development will reveal the layers of catastrophes, leaving the old operations intact and simultaneously proposing new

development. This requires new modes of planning operations:

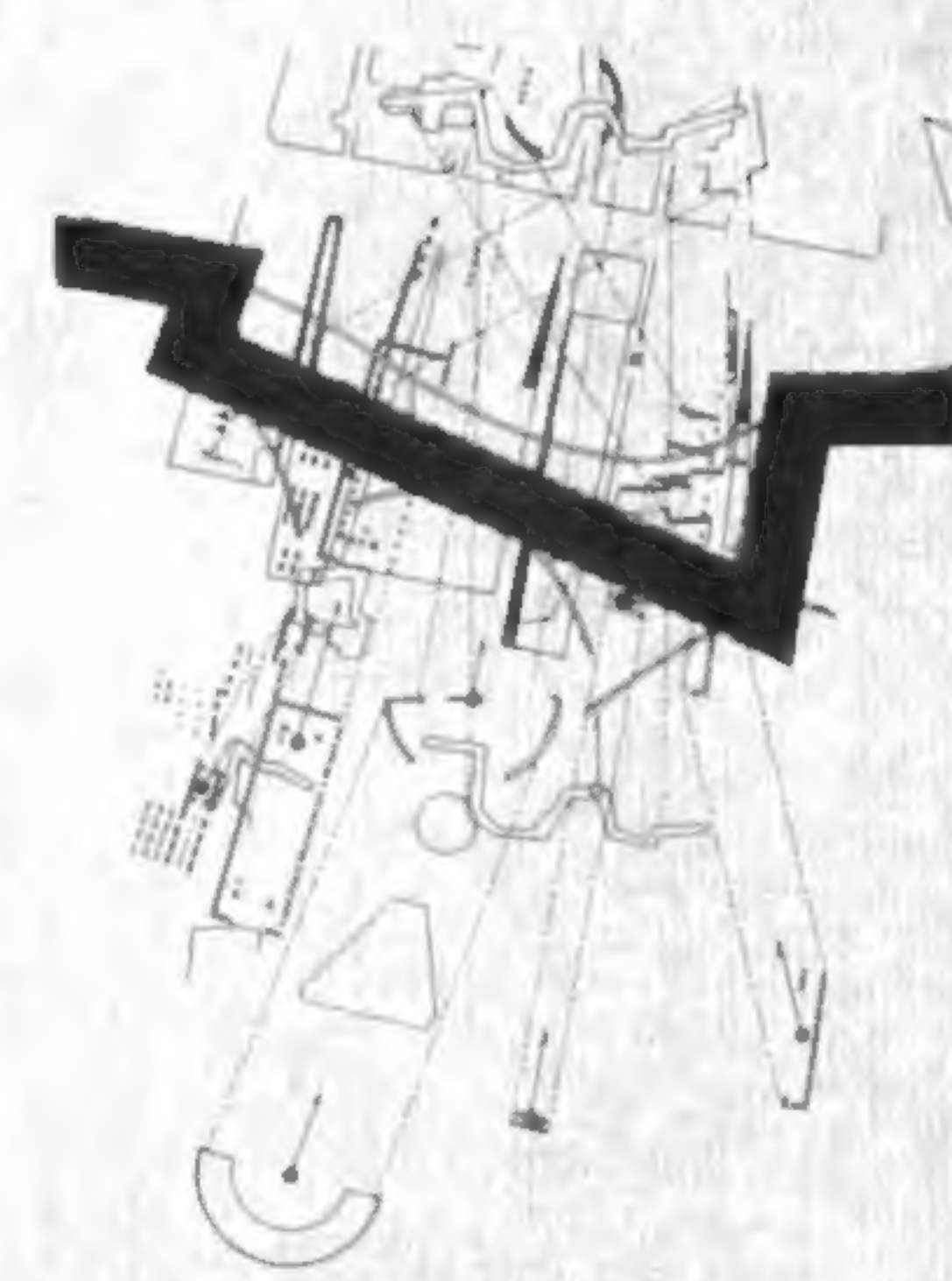
- 1 To think of the city in section depicting different layers of operations at the same time.
- 2 To have the courage to leave scarred areas as they have been found and help their development by adding new layers of operation.

As an overall move we used a deliberate misreading of two supposedly unrelated but actually very related strategies:

- 1 The strategies of conventional war
- 2 The operations of conventional medicine

We used strategy maps of attack and counterattack which overlaid the area with fields of tension and relief and used maps of operations on war victims, where burned skin was relocated and wounds cleaned and sewn together to formulate an architectural tactic, where 'strategy' and 'operation' are used in a deliberate misreading to insert new structures into the destroyed area.

This tactic involved the development of an architectural veneer above and around the destroyed souk area, encouraging new growth in the spaces in-between. This could be initiated by the neighborhoods themselves in that they collectively sell the air rights above the existing souk area and then use the financial outcome to renovate and upgrade the area without losing its partitioned and decentralized character. Thin threads of pedestrian bridges create a new urban network, which together with the veneer bandages reconnect the gap created by that war. The new whimsical thread structures originate around the Place d'Etoile and will hover above and between the old ruins, new veneer territories, originating at the



#### 12 Rebuilding Beirut -- Misreading the War

War strategies reused to find the strategy for repairs.

and Other Modernist Myths, MIT, Cambridge, Mass, fifth edition, 1988.

7. *ibid.*, pp.125-129. This small paragraph actually covers a lot of material I am concerned with, as it addresses the abstract, its role as a demystifying term as well as one's possibility to translate the found material.

8. Song text of Laurie Anderson: 'I think we should put some mountains here — otherwise one of the characters is going to fall off'.

Dagmar Richter lives in Los Angeles and is Associate Professor of Architecture at the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning in UCLA. Born in Germany, she has received Vordiplom from the University of Stuttgart (1976), and Master of Architecture from the Royal Art Academy in Copenhagen (1982), and did post graduate studies at Stedelschule in Frankfurt under Peter Cook (1984-86). She has worked on various projects and competitions with offices in Boston (1986-89) and Los Angeles (1989 to present), which includes an addition to a Neutra building and houses in the Pacific Palisades and Westwood, and was a finalist in the West Coast Gateway Competition (1988), on which she collaborated with Shayne O'Neil. She has exhibited in Gallery Rom (Oslo), Gallery Scala (Copenhagen), Fenster Gallery (Frankfurt), Graduate School of Design at Harvard, MIT Museum and Cooper Union. Her works have been published in *A+U*, *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, *Assemblage*, *Werk Bauen Wohnen* and *Storefront Reports*. She has taught at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, Cooper Union, Rhode Island School of Design and other schools.

**Rereading the city: Berlin the new capital**  
My ongoing investigations into mapping, form finding, form interpretations and translations are now leading back to Berlin. As Berlin needs a new city structure and a new parliament, it is more than necessary to further study different historical maps and investigate their reflection of power. I use these maps to gain a critical reading on the orders and different representations of the site. The material is transformed through a translation from two-dimensional information to three-dimensional model, which in turn gives a reading of a new order for a city which was erased from the earth more than 40 years ago. The will to impose a specific architectural and urban order over Berlin by Hitler went so far that he declared the bombings through the second world war to be a blessing, as construction for the new world order could start without obstacles.

These maps are a reflection of the different philosophies that have been prevalent through time. Changing definitions of inside-outside, orders of the landscape from the utilized to the simulated romantic garden, the imposition of the new rationalist ideas in the 18th century and the imposition of a Third Reich representation through a new city plan, as well as the erasure of most of the previous orders by the second world war, can be found within these studies.

The maps give us an opportunity to go further into the history of the site and to use the collected material in a conscious design process that will be more sensitive to the site's own history and its role in philosophical and political representation.

**Research Team:**  
Kai-Uwe Bergman, Gretchen Von Grossman, Nina Leiser, Jonathan Massey, Michael Miller, Steven Padlock, Carola Sapper, Helder Svelin, Patrick Tigae

#### Special Event

#### A reception

to celebrate the publication of  
Mark Robbins' *Angles of Incidence* by the  
Princeton Architectural Press

January 8, 1993  
Friday, 6:30 pm

*Angles of Incidence* represents an in-progress survey of the work of architect Mark Robbins. This work takes the form of small-scale constructions, drawings and installations. Robbins' projects investigate the urban and rural landscape of the United States and explore the intersection of the built environment with the culture. The work deals with the embodiment of the city, its erotic and often claustrophobic intimacy, and its representation of power. His interest in film, media, and the interaction of high and popular culture is evident in his architectural work, which abstracts and appropriates from these diverse sources. The publication is funded in part by a grant from the Graham Foundation.

80 pp, 7-3/4" x 10-3/4", paperbound, 133 b/w & 85 color illustrations, \$19.95